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ELKIN MATHEWS
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ELKIN MATHEWS, VIGO
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TO SARAH GORDON

*Too many years have touched you now ;
Your gentle hands that bless us yet,
The clearer candour of your brow,
Bring us our first regret.*

*This thing is hard to us, that while,
In ministrancies untired and new
Forgetting self, you wait and smile,
Yet time forgets not you.*

*I set your name herein—receive
My reverence with my poems' dear hours :
Ah, if they should endure, this leaf
Would hold you always ours.*

A HYMN OF TOUCH

THESE magnificent senses
Are all life, one sense, enlightenment
Of any salvation ; poised eternal expenses
On loveliness, the one music, intent ;
Senses heightened, senses magnificent.

Every man of art has loved one sense,
Loved it into governance of his ways ;
Sound prepared Milton for his dense
Primitive blindness, mirror intense,
Dark mirror where heaven and each dark thing
 repeats ;
Gautier guessed at life in his palate's space ;
Colour flavoured the Springtide that was Keats ;
Rossetti mistook odour into colour,
Even his full forms by odour were fuller.
A sense to each ; the ways of them were such.

I await the god, the illumined who shall know
The justice of each sense is tact, is touch ;
I await a kindler of the worlds to show
Many portions of art grown one by touch,

Touch like the unfelt wind that changes the
stars ;
That melts the heart at news of women's old
wars ;
Touch like the searching sympathies
Dipt Dian thrilled with her shrinking knees
To a dark wood well, deeper than woodland,
set
Down silver grasses and small ferns pale with
youth . . .
There are gold grapes whose contact we forget
Which leave an odourous mouth.

For touch is the spirit and rule of all ;
When the heart awakens and eyelids fall
Exquisite lashes on creeping cheeks are sign
Of the obscure ways in which used flesh grows
fine.
The touch of brushes, the touch of strings and
keys
With a crystal core that outward and inward
slips,
Even music's interstellar silences,
Are but prolonged far-reaching finger-tips :
The touch of moonlight
Felt through noon-light,

The touch of mirrors upon the eyes,
Of mirroring water in a silver bowl,
The sense of being silked in dyes
For which a Venice merchant changed his soul,
Large expanses
Of seaward glances
Where the unseen world is felt by the sea's long
roll ;
Such are its inward kingdom, each a hid device
By which the heart of things touches to guide
and fire—
Touch with the palate ; touch with the nostrils ;
touch with the eyes :
Touch with the reins and yearning ; touch
with desire.

Love is every diverse way of it.
When the man beholds the woman a far touch
slips
(Like cold still wines
Sipped to feel their sense of lines)
Luminously, unlit,
As under ocean's rims a star at dawn
To light hid waves ; the touch of lips
Divines position of body's and soul's degrees.
If death has drawn
One lover from another ere old peace,

The scars of what she once had said
Touch him, as though with growth dis-
comforted.

Touch is understanding by relation,
Touch is sympathy and so creation.

The rose-dead ruins beyond the sky
Shelter its alien heart at night
And move me to reach again to the never nigh ;
The sleepless quietude of remote hills
Whose aëry waiting is alert with touch
Sets clearer light
Along their crest before the heavens begin—
A light of earth the heavens within,
That makes an interspace and fills
As when man's soul for his body is overmuch.

Shall we await for ever the ecstasy,
Wait, wait for ever and know we shall not
know ?

O dusky cream of cherry bloom just high,
There was one such touch as yours from bough
to bough

Hovering a little underneath
Yet almost about to lift in an unseen breath,
When in an early twilight of early May
We listened for one blackbird far away,

Precision of passion, the touch of a voice
On night, on our choice
Of hopeless retreating things for our joys.
Then ere a soundless dawn of early May
We listened as we lay
For the premonition of light in the wave of the
 wakening birds.
Not physical touch in Chopin satisfied
Encloses the heart and girds ;
And when I reach my arms in pride
I reach my hands in vain ;
I take them back, until by yearning and pain
Contact comes and knowledge in the extent
Of all senses magnificent.

OF HORSES

HOLD power between thy knees ; yea, string
thy wrists

To govern surges with a bitted thong :

These can transfer thy will and leave thee
strong

As if thy hips continued his who twists.

If thou wert made another way about,

Power in thy forearms that must yet grow
down,

Wouldst thou not stretch them thoughtlessly,
unshewn,

Discovering leaps and gallopings thereout—

Never bewildered by four sounds beneath,

Nor thought that two must mean another nigh ?

(Thus man is shaped to lift his arms on high

And tends to adoration as to breathe.)

Wouldst think that resting has no need to
cower,

And, stayed on four dewed legs, slumber
upright

Like a hoar Druid thing made huge by night.
When thou wouldst fight, then couldst thou
rear and tower.

Thou wouldst not fear, though hid and even
pied,
The colour of thy children when unborn ;
Thy strong accepting heart would judge man's
scorn—
Who loves strange hair but spurns a darker
hide.

Yet wert thou thus a horse thy sideways glance
Would see man large and unfamiliar ;
Eyes' covert nature wary and aware,
Loose tender mouth should make thee dumbly
man's.

THE WHITE WATCH ❧

(Opus 28. No. 3.)

APPLE boughs lie in the eaves,
On windless nights the apple leaves
Chirp against the window panes
Slightly as a mist that rains.
Apple boughs lie on the roof ;
Feet of more than one dove
(Doves asleep) stir at nights
Among the leaves as dark alights.
Summer nights, ah, summer nights
When she set the casement wide
With fingers like the leaves outside—
Like a moonbeam her white arm
Reached to winy apples, warm
As her bed already cooling :
While all the time she heard the lulling
Of the river sinking by,
Saw London's light pulse up the sky
Like darkness filtered pale and thin,
Like London's sound that hummed therein ;

❧ After the design by Mr. C. H. Shannon.

Lonely footfalls sounded thin
In the street below the wall.
Will you make so lone a call,
Summer nights to come no more ?

Roses that under the moon seemed hoar
Looked mirrored in the sleeping house
By the small face through the apple boughs.
Empty nights will have no fruit
Of faces like large apples mute,
Summer nights to come no more.

Moonlight spreading on the shore
Of summer night and wedding eve
Waked her, wrought her to retrieve
All she wished she could forget,
Till her spent joys felt dearer yet.
Downstairs the tender evening through
No lamps were lit, no music drew
Her heart to meet the night, the dew.
Sweet comers in the high pale room
Fingered their orient scarves' perfume
And lost themselves down its dim length ;
Often they stretched a rustling length
That was the morrow's wonder robes
Carried in armfuls from wardrobes ;

Often they praised each other's choice
With finger and cheek, but with hushed voice
Lest the heart-lulling melancholy
Of that calm room be made less holy.

When the gracious evening ended
Muteness being with darkness blended,
They remembered, they remember,
Guests are slumbering in each chamber :
So the wedding girls must dip
Down deep large cushions and shawls to sleep
Round the bride's bed on her floor.

Once in that disturbing store
Of charms and secrets and surprise,
They clasp their mistress, cover her eyes,
Bare her and garment her for dreams,
Lay her in bed where moonlight brims,
With teasing touches and kisses shed
And merry blind wisdom lay her abed.

Wedding maids bridal girls
Shawled under dropt curls
Sink about her, whisper awhile,
Hear her pillow stir with her smile ;
Then with plaintive longing think
Of her loss and gain, shrink
Till breathing lashes on small cheeks wink.

Why must she wake with moonlight's touch
And sleep no more, nor wake so much
As her night-life in the old days ?
She watched the essenced moony rays
Stir the down on her maids' cheeks
(Down like their age counted in weeks),
Wedding maids bridal girls
With nightgowns hid in falling curls,
With arms and necks uncovered by sleep
That will reveal hid thoughts acreep.

She thought of all to-morrow's birth,
Of her new joy and coming worth ;
She slipped the coverlid from her,
Tip-toed like girls' tresses astir
Between her girls of virgin lore
Who floated under her on the floor
Like her thoughts of the next night ;
She quietly lit the night-light
Which had burnt by her mother's death bed ;
She shrank as though fallen from darkness o'er-
head.

A pearl seemed ever to be at her lips ;
She seemed to hold in her fingers' tips
A palpitant pulp, soft fruit alive,
She felt her flesh a cushion between
Herself and all she touched, a screen

Life and mere real things to sever,
Like a mist upon a river
That will not let a mazarin
Dying butterfly fall in.

She opened then her cupboard door
To stroke over over and o'er
Lawns and lace, ribands and veil
With which she would be scarcely pale
When morn her clinging webs should deck
In the gown with love-knots low on the neck,
And maids should bring spread down their arms
Trains and under-tints, jewels and charms.

She twitched for prayer the little heap
Of voile hemmed for her first sleep
Forgot the silence she must keep,
And a bride girl peered at her from the floor.

LARCHES

LET us walk in the wood,
In our aisle of the larches ;
The winter dawn parches
Your brow in your hood,
But the pine dell is dimmer
Than this twilight, your hair,
And Summer's green glimmer
May wait for us there.

Ah, Mine, dawn is older
(Some sweet breath has stopped)
Since when on your shoulder
Pale breast-down was dropt,
And we saw up the mist
Of the inner larch-webbing
A drooping owl ebbing
So softly we kissed.

What shadow went there . . .
Press more closely ; I hearken ;
O, will your voice darken ?
'Tis a thing we must bear.
I wait and I wonder—
A gleam half unknown
Is breathing—is blown—
Slips under—slipt under. . . .

THE VIADUCT

AND when I found the narrowing estuary
I saw a railway bridge through twilit mist ;
It seemed by veils suspended to exist,
But a hushed tide washed under clankingly.

A train from London crossed it in the night :
I woke and saw a tossing burning mane,
And felt some tragic woman passed again
With trailing tresses in dispurposed flight.

Unending luggages dragged past all day,
Piled trucks, tarpaulin mounds, and heavy vans ;
Considering this monotony some chance
Steep contour of its iron sad array

Made me remember thus it must have been
That Cæsar's trampling Triumphant appeared—
Elephants heaving, fuming flames upreared,
Stacked waggons, slow unthinking slaves between.

IN CHURCH

THE priest, in thoughtless daily use,
Delivered the fairy tale of Eve :
I felt what made good Greeks believe
That Bacchos came from a thigh of Zeus,

Thanked my complete omnivulent God
Who made the serpent with suave power
In that ungoverned knowing hour
Creators see He must have trod. . . .

I thanked the God for all the joy
Ordained for me by Eve's best sin:
Except for God she might have been
Stainless and ever a garden-toy.

In her the Mother sinned for us,
Bringing us evil and more good ;
Growth and a soul from this ensued.
'Twas soul's first instinct so to choose.

The preacher read a parable
About a sower sowing seed,
Yea, and about each separate deed
It did to places where it fell.

Some fell upon the stony ground
And swiftly bred abundantly :
This seemed most beautiful to me,
To make such barrenness abound.

Yet most I praised the stony soil
That did so rare and great a thing,
Spending its power to serve its King,
Unmasked by man's officious toil.

Arable man, removing stones,
Might well educe tame hundredfolds,
But not that ardent burst of golds
That proud tired yielding to the sun's.

THE MILLINER

THE hats are really large this season, Madam ; their brims no longer curve to your hair-knot so that only a shadow or a flower may droop between. You will be obliged to dress your hair much higher ; this brim extends almost from shoulder to shoulder, and the crown will need to touch more firmly at the back.

Alas, Madam, I cannot shew you perfectly ; the fashion has come unexpectedly, and my model had to change the mode of her coiffure so immediately and completely that an hour ago she fainted from the pain. No, Madam ; there can be no danger from my girls. . . . Her hair is purified each morning, and her health is untouched ; but she is to be married in the Summer.

It is impossible not to have the strings. We attach them to the edges of the brim, and tie them much more lightly. They must be of ribbon as wide as both your palms, and almost as long as your skirt.

I cannot give you those shades, Madam ; they are not used together now, and could not be effective.

These plumes would be more becoming than all else I could suggest. . . . Ah, yes, they are torn from living birds to preserve their changing light ; I remember you have always refused to share the cruelty, but that is a past fashion now, Madam. You will not have them ?

I could gather a wreath of clouded chiffon into this ample brooch. You do not admire jewelled hats ? But consider this one pearl—I am assured it cost the lives of two men ; its unusual tinge of blue would harmonise cunningly with the grey chiffon. You choose the brooch ? Very well, Madam.

TANAGRET

DEAR lady of a tomb,
Her ashes' thin grey bloom
Wrinkled your frills with hue
Who once was you.

A lover of women tall
Made you so slim and small
To keep the shape and whole
Height of a soul.

O, madam, madam, please
I would cherish your little knees
Because she laughed at stir
Of silk on her.

Curved body of light earth
Filled for unending birth,
Your mastering god's hand-tips
Gathered your lips.

Dead fingers felt it sweet
Such bosoms to complete ;
I desire to touch such tulle,
Turn women to jewels,

Hint skirts of pale large shawls,
Pompeian parasols
Grown unexpected hats,
Stroke women as cats—

It trances that a bland
And momentary hand
Should leave both hidden flesh
And its silk mesh.

An opaque amber death,
Dusty as with old breath,
Joins me with past things now,
Lady, in you.

SONG FROM A MASQUE

WHAT do the maids at shearing-time ?
One doffs her skirts and into the water,
For all the last year's lambs have sought her
Sniffing 'tis she who once brought grain
To fill their mothers' dugs again ;
Mazed by her sheep-bell sing-song rime
She draws one into the foam-veined pool
And furrowing through its deep wet wool
Slips her brown fingers small yet full.

What do the maids at shearing-time ?
One at the dark, webbed shippon's door
Hears muffled sounds on an earthen floor ;
Thence she toils with a haltered ewe
Up to the barn to other two,
Two maids who hum a sheep-bell rime
And part the fleece in the left hand's span
Ere it curls cream-thick from the shears grey-
wan—
A maid can clip as well as a man.

SAILORS

I

WHEN he came to Circe's house
In a garden in a wood
Gates of brass so tall so narrow
Diapered with blossom bee and sparrow
Shewed a girl with silky blouse
Frilled and ruched and flowered with blood.

Gates of brass so safe for peeps
Where his eye winked wing for bird
Shewed him juicy petals dropping
Where swished flouncy skirts were never stop-
ping,
Slim carved shafts half hid by heaps—
Fruits brocades wings jewels and curd.

Circe tore her silky sleeves
In her eagerness for whips ;
Where her little wolves were fawning
Underneath her bright wistaria awning
Straight she took their chains in sheaves,
Lashed them then from throat to hips.

Under a trellis of roses worn
Circe's ladies quite quite fair
Clasped maimed wolves that winced and
whimpered ;
Near their feet two strutting dove-hens ; simpered
While with batter of feathers torn
Doves fought flying in the air.

II

Why does the land cease here ? Determinedly,
Quietly it decides, and thus devolves ;
Such motionless, such stark unhesitancy
'Troubles the dreams in me
Like sudden and invincible resolves.

The miracle of water always wrought,
Stability which silent fish believe,
Limits beyond our breath, valleys uncaught,
Burden mistrustful thought
With senses how that bosom could deceive.

Man's life should be by water ; if its course
May slide more easily in folly and haste
'Tis kindly lost, bubbles betray no source ;
If wise by grace and force,
Better a thing so trivial be effaced.

The serried noses of unready ships
Peer out like lurking rats from rifts of stone :
Are these the leaning birds of fledgy tips
That, loosed, with shivers and dips
Depart by separate oceans and alone ?

Let me enlarge the world and know what verge
Escapes this mask of earth for balance thrown :
And I would seek how alien laws can urge
Fearless recoiling surge
Against surrounding rhythms to obey the moon.

Embark, my heart : the lip of all the land
Is under flamelets that outline the dark ;
Lost figures with white vacant faces stand,
Hand moves to hidden hand ;
Rope slips, the near thwart sinks . . . My heart,
embark.

THE WHITE WATCH ☞

(Opus 27. No. 2.)

O LIFELESS garden of the moon
You look as if I am unknown ;
Across the valley the trees twist
As though bewildered by the mist—
They are strange because I have not come.
The moonlight makes the pale owl dumb.
Like window veils in mirrors a hum
Of little flies waving their feet
Dims the air like a flicker of heat—
Before my window they spin and rise
In a shapeless cloud as wide as my eyes
Because the moonlight draws long streaks
Of earth-breath warm as girls' moist cheeks
Wavering up in vibrant veins.

They taper like my body's pains.

Moonbeams must have made these stains
Of whiteness on my narrow feet—
Through my long nightgown and one sheet
The moon has soaked night after night
Dissolving in me the linen's white.
There was a moon when I last stood
Loosing my flowered silk and my mood,

☞ After the design by Mr. C. H. Shannon.

Looking down into air as slow
As water with a light below
But I think it must not have been this moon,
For I have lain long though it comes soon ;
A chill slim fever has made me thin
Until my soul has whitened my skin
And keen lithe shudders have left me slight—
As though I had drunk too much moonlight.
There may have been days, but I only know
Nights and the moon I lay below ;
And they watched, Elise and Rosanelle,
With unbound hair and robes that fell
To reveal their feet, sleep-robes so fine ;
They gave me liquids crystalline
And white food toned with heavy white wine ;
They watched that I did not leave these spaces
And go with the moon to other places,
For I dare not sleep lest I lose hold
And die in my sleep like a flower in a fold
When it slips from your neck inside your things.
O, I would sleep as still and clear
And hollow as the deep light here—
Suspended from earth's wanderings.
But Rosanelle and married Elise
Say my fever's secrecies
Are dry, so they may lie on the floor
And sleep to listen for my door

I know they could waken if they heard
The little chir (as of cooling curd)
When bedclothes settle on one just dead.
Yet I have wavered from my bed
Through the scent of their bodies to pass ;
I have taken their lantern of cinnamon glass
(Litten to look at me in the dark
Moon-beams stir up beyond their mark),
I have hung its cord my wrist to mar
That I may feel an attendant star
While now between the shutters I gaze
To find my antique moony ways
The other stars, as I Hesperise,
Crawl up the heavens like old flies.
The darkness of air beneath its light
Makes it my mirror infinite—
Darkness sinks in mine eyes so far
I can feel them repeat each floating star,
Until mine eyes become the air
Whose darkness seems some moon-skirt spare,
So soft that the quivering touch of sight
Sinks beyond its down of light.
Pale inflammation of the moon
With intense clearness strokes me too soon ;
I am cool as the red flowers hovering slow
A little over the garden below.

EARLY VENEZIAN DETAIL

LITTLE cat of an angel,
Did the Virgin kiss you ?
Will the poor Dear miss you,
Pretending with your lute ?
She has the other angel
Perching near Her tissue,
Cheek against Her foot,
Peeping over his flute.

Sleeky purring angel,
Did She, feather by feather,
Seek a red and green one
For the Child to play ?
Will the other angel
Shut his wings together,
Spread for mocking and preen one,
Flutter the Child away ?

Little cat of a darling,
Did you bring the Virgin
A glass with meadow-spurge in
To light Her window-sill ?
With faint and dainty snarling
Your wingy brother Rosy
Set a columbine posy
For Her skirts to spill.

A HYMN OF FORM

THE holy virtue of living, the soul's delight,
The sense of ordination that accuses,
The excellent wonder of limit whence day and
 night
Gather eternity and change,
Yea great desire so great that it refuses,
And reverence that loses,
Are form ; the nature of godhead to derange,
To keep all vivid, fruitful, vitally strange ;
Form without reason, with no explanation by
 uses.

Water's power and presence
Composed by a far moon's crescence,
The warm huge lazy drift of the bended sea :
The change of a short season,
Nude rhythm, no growth, no lesion,
That makes a worm be earth, wet earth be a
 tree :
The mood of a girl to weep,
Laugh, weep, or kiss her scars :
The hills that never go to sleep ;
White mountains, youthful stars :

We do not forget these things. We know
There is no progress anywhere—
By dark recurrence alone we grow
Endless, immortal, godlike, bare,
And do not care.
The power of Form divines us, heavy and slow,
Heedless and fair.

This is the instinct of our perfecting:
The lust of creation, the ache for forming,
The mathematic beauty warming
As intellectual exact ardours sting
Till proud inevitable solutions spring.

Form is eternal father of existence ;
Form is change of colour ; it is distance—
That faint last air of inward light
Which stirs our only divination
That where we stand is infinite.
Form works within the purging and the strife
Of prayer and other acts of imagination ;
In the disconcerting logic of a woman,
Delicate and inhuman,
Which makes all living nothing in desire of life.
A vacant thing it seems
Touched with inscrutable gleams,
Till knowledge of shadows leaves
Mysterious life which cleaves—

The body most revealed by perfect clothing.
Form is completion and will say
(As cypress turns its edges to the air,
Unguidable and spare,)
“Bring not one touch ; take that away—
A little more and there would be nothing.”

There is a planet girds itself with rings ;
A woman fashions slow unconsciousness,
Her body quiet as a mind.
Blindness and Blake and all primeval things
(Blindness, that moonlight of the senses' space)
Contain a primitive order unconfined,
Depths of denial, wells of might—
Form without reason, with no explanation by
 uses :
Rapt in gigantic joy that with no thinking
 chooses,
It knows its mastery ; and this delight
The Jews by their Jehovah signify
Who thrust the darkness rolling down the sky.
The spider's web is part of the spider's nerves ;
Its edge of lines merges as near to curves
As intuitions of colour to shapes that stir them,
Yet no curves ever come ;
But, if a touch makes curves, the thing will fear
 them

And reach a dreadful thigh because he is dumb.
Form, grown so real and indivisible,
Broods on itself as though it could not cease—
White eagerness transcending up a rill
That seems like peace.

Peace ? The creators are forbidden peace ;
To reach down fire and laughter from the skies
Leaves a new longing and a hard unease
As if to suffer the gleam on the pale seas
And that which in it cries.
Peace comes alone by form just perfected,
By moments that may bring
An earth to death, discovering,
Before one ruining mountain can be shed,
Rabbits' twitched ears above the lengthening
grass
Heightning the hush upon the evening
Till rapture seems quite poised, never to pass.
Form comes, peace comes ; the heart stands
still, then reels ;
(Night makes a mirror of a window-pane
And shows one waiting for love her perfect
cheek) ;
One moment, as when ousels pause for rain,
A bloom is on the air, until it feels
As if, after all, God is and is about to speak.

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The past survives chiefly in its arts; art must always be paramount to man, for only by it can he conceive the nature of creation.

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